

Outline and assess the value of 'mobilization theory'



Is working class collectivism being displaced by new individualisation? Are we about to see a regeneration of trade union power? Is social partnership between employers and employees a positive step for both? How has the state's role changed in relation to labour relations? These are just some of the questions Kelly's Mobilization theory attempts to answer by drawing on a wide range of literature by other academics on this subject and re-examining, refining and revising the existing theoretical framework.

This essay will attempt to identify the main features and principles of Mobilization theory as a model of labour relations. In order to do this the work of Kelly and others will be analysed. Mobilization Theory Critique of other approaches to industrial relations and collective actions will be evaluated. Finally, the role that the state plays in labour relations and whether it has changed will be identified and assessed. Primary sources of research material used to formulate this essay were books, journals, class handouts and the Internet.

John Kelly's analysis of industrial relations produces a wide-ranging attempt to examine the principles of Mobilization of the workforce. His theory identifies how individuals acquire and are converted into a collective force, how they then formulate effectively in order to address their grievance, and also the logistics and circumstances that are necessary for collective action to take place. It is Tilley (1918) who first proposed a model for Mobilization based on Marxist ideas, Kelly uses Tilley's concept and develops it further. Tilley's theory of collective action is broken down into five components.

Firstly, interests – this area addresses how and the ways in which workers come to define themselves, opposing groups and the interests of both. Social movement theorists have broken down the definitions of interests into two main questions: why and how do people acquire a sense of injustice and grievance and how does that grievance become collective? (Kelly 1998) McAdam (1988) believes grievances arise when people are 'cognitively liberated', which enables them to form the opinion that an act which affects them is in some way unfair or unjust. This dissatisfaction can then give way to a feeling of grievance which leads on to a sense of injustice and illegitimacy, these factors may then, according to McAdam, form the basis for collective action. Kelly 1998) The shared desire to challenge the power of the employer can arise through a number of collective experiences, for example political, cultural or religious beliefs, discussion and socialisation. It is also more likely to occur if a common outlook, such as a belief that the action is in their best interests and can improve their position is presumed. Kelly refers to Sherif's 1966 Summer Camp Study, in which he states that intergroup conflict arises as a result of a conflict of interest when two groups want to achieve the same goal, but cannot have it, this leads to in-group solidarity (Gross 1996).

Organisation is the second agent necessary to aid collective interest moving forwards. Union or group organisation, its location of power the level of representation it provides, will all help determine the capacity and willingness to advance with collective action (Classnotes). The number of union recognition deals signed in 1999 more than doubled over the previous year. A major report for the TUC carried out by the Labour Research

Department, supports the claim that the legal right to union recognition has had a huge impact (Gall 2000).

This new organisation, backed up by legislation passed through parliament in July 1999, has given unions and their members more confidence which, according to Kelly, should give an increase in size and power to group organisations, and in turn the willingness of workers to act collectively.

Mobilization is defined as taking collective control over resources needed for action (Classnotes) and makes up the third dimension contributing to Tilley's ' Collective Action Theory'. This involved the group weighing up the cost of benefits of taking collective action. The pursuit of common goals is much more likely to take place if the chance of success is high. Klandermans (1984) states other benefits like goal, social and rewards motives, like the perceived reactions of significant others and the number of others expected to offer the same level of support along with personal gain will all be calculated against possible costs, such as the prospect of job or pay losses (Kelly 1998). Leadership plays a vital role in such deliberations and Kelly points out that this is a relatively unexplored area in collective action theories.

A leader is able to promote group cohesion, persuade and provide essential support to facilitate positive thinking, and define goals. A strong leader is also invaluable when facing the counter-mobilization of employers. Hosking (1984) suggests that a leader must be good at processing information, bargaining and negotiation, knowing and representing the surrounding environment (Gross 1996). Few would argue that these skills would be highly influential in times of worker mobilization. Group identity is also considered <https://assignbuster.com/outline-and-assess-the-value-of-mobilization-theory/>

by Kelly. Group dynamics include such processes as cohesiveness, communication power and decision making.

It can be easily seen then that the study of group structure can be very beneficial when considering collective action, along with Attribution Theory which originally comes from Heider (1958) and refers to how the individual's disposition, beliefs and attitudes are seen as the cause of a particular behaviour, and how the situation whether external or situational such as money, treats or luck are seen as the cause, when related to collective action we can see that internal attribution theory when applied to an unsatisfactory agreement being reached with an employer will see the workers blame themselves making further action less likely. Whilst an external attribution would see the company blamed for the lack of a settlement, this can then lead to a sense of injustice, prompt a greater persistence to fight on (Gross 1996). Another of the functions attribution plays is to protect group identity as negative behaviours of the group can be explained away as being due to external forces, and positive ones are seen as due to internal forces thus promoting confidence and strength. The fourth component that is tackled by Kelly is opportunity and this refers to the actions and policies of the state and employers and how the balance of power between ruling and subordinate groups can influence the willingness of workers to pursue collective action.

With Union membership increasing the TUC believe this shows a new mood of optimism among unions, who are more confident that they have been in a long time that the cycle of declining union recognition, and with it shrinking membership can be halted (Gull 2000). This increased confidence may then, <https://assignbuster.com/outline-and-assess-the-value-of-mobilization-theory/>

according to Kelly/Tilly strengthen workers commitment to corporate goals.

Tilly's final element is the collective action that will arise and become shaped by the four previous elements. Collective action explains many acts of uprising not just striking, work-to-rule, overtime bans and go-slow are all examples that have been used by employees. Striking is usually the most powerful tool as is often the most costly to the employer (Kelly 1998).

Examining these social processes shows that they are powerful forces with the ability to transform collective action, and this is ultimately the behaviour of a united workforce. Kelly's Mobilization theory critiques a wide range of literature previously published in the area of industrial relations, much of this work is subject to criticism by Kelly for being theoretically weak, and so he attempts to re-examine many existing theoretical frameworks. Phelps Brown's (1990) article receives much interest from Kelly in Chapter 4 of his book. Brown's work is based on historical evidence that strong collectivist attributes are born in the 19th Century due to social deprivation poverty and job insecurities. These social factors according to Brown then lead to a widespread sense of mutual inter-dependence and solidarity, and he has examined how trade unionism has taken on the role of defender and promoter of class interests (Kelly 1998). He has then examined how changes that have taken place in employment and transport have led to a movement away from communities built around heavy industry, to smaller work units and geographical dispersal of workers.

This combined with increased affluence of the working class, and the belief that their way forward was through education and training has seen workers who are now more concerned with consumerism rather than collective action

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or solidarity Kelly believes that Brown's theory on union membership and industrial action would appear flawed for a number of reasons. Firstly, he bases his whole thesis on historical evidence that is widely generalised, and it also appears factually selective, and possibly open to his own interpretations. It has no detailed evidence or framework. Brown has not looked deeply into the issues or details surrounding collectivism, and therefore he makes the assumption that changes in the collective interests and their action, organisation go hand in hand, but Kelly's Mobilization theory states that workers may have a clear agreed definition of collective interests, but may lack the organisational means to pursue it. Kelly also accuses Phelps over romanticizing of 'Golden Age' of worker collectivism by failing to acknowledge the political divisions that existed and the amount of effort that was required to make collectivism possible. His explanation that the collective actions of the workers arose due to social conditions such as poverty, deprivation and a lack of affluence, but Kelly points out, this did not take into account the other incidents of collective action involving relatively well paid workers in 1968 - 1974.

This sees his belief that white-collar, well-paid, professional or skilled workers are the most individual thinking and least prone to collectively mobilise, called into question as they tended to form the majority of union membership between 1979-1996. Kelly argues that Brown has made little attempt to distinguish either analytically or through means of experimentation to arrive at his conclusions. We have analysed Kelly's analysis of Brown in depth but other writers work, who Kelly has dissected include Dunlop's System's theory, which in his view, is used mainly as a description framework. Kelly

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develops this further with his ideas on workers choice in relation to balance of power and its influence on shaping choices and effectiveness of such choices. Manor Olson's ' Logic of Collective Action' is highly criticised by Kelly, he believes that the theory that incentives and coercion necessary to build collective organisation, completely fails to consider the social and economic forces that push so many workers into both long-term union membership and periodic out-pouring of collective action. A post-Fordist perspective also suffers a negative review by Kelly who explains that they are ineffective at explaining the rise and decline, the persistence and potential revival of collective organisations and actions (Turner 1999).

Tilly also believed that Flanders view on the nature of collective bargaining and workers interests is very ill defined (Kelly 1998). Both Flanders and Clegg according to Kelly are somewhat intellectually lazy, to except that workers interests are intertwined with their bargaining demands. Kelly's view is that the work of these authors and many others is that there is not enough analytical treatment and considerations given to the subject of workers interests (Kelly 1998). However, Kelly's book equally contains many examples of literature sources that he supports, uses and revises Tilly, McAdam and Lukes are just some examples. Kelly's critique of others approaches to Industrial Relations provides a thorough innovative and stimulating development of concepts and theoretical perspectives in their application to the study of industrial relations (Turner 1999). The Theory of Social Partnership and the idea of human resource management practices are based on the assumption that difficulties between workers and employees can be worked out amicable, without fear of reprisal.

Such management strategies aimed at influencing workers attitudes are one of a range of personnel policies which have come about since the 1980's. The concern is that management is attempting to increase the identification of the workforce with the goals of the company, by methods of employee participation and involvement, performance appraisals payment and rewards systems (Linn 1986). These types of ideas are intended to involve the workforce and encourage their engagement in the organisational competitiveness problem, and incorporate the workers into company outlooks and objectives. Quality, ' Customer first' and ' Company mission' are leading corporatist concepts, in the theory of empowerment for employees (Fisher, Camfield and Weir 1994). Other HRM policies designed to influence workers attitudes include the use of psychological testing, psychological pressure and group discipline, individualised rates of pay and contracts.

Team concept can include a new managerial layer of ' team leader' providing a softer more supportive style of management, unlike the old authorisation supervisors. The idea is to keep the teams small so they develop their own identity and become the focus for loyalty, and will pull together to solve problems. Workers can feel pressurised to see other teams of employees as an internal customer who's stock demands must be supplied. TGWN members at Ford have re-named it the ' Fast as you can system' (Linn 1989).

' Team Concepts' has its critics; Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter have consistently attacked the ideology because they believe " The reality has little to do with quality, as we usually understand the term, and a lot about management control. (Fisher, Camfield & Weir, 1994) Kelly identifies that <https://assignbuster.com/outline-and-assess-the-value-of-mobilization-theory/>

underpinning the increase in social partnership is the profound sense of union weakness. The enormous and well documented defeats, suffered by unions during the last 30 years, along with the anti-union laws inflicted by the new Right Governments and economic recession have all played their part in undermining confidence in union power, and this has led employees, adapting as best they can, by seeking out those issues on which they can forge common or compatible objectives with employers (Kelly 1998). Whilst unions now concentrate on more moderate objectives like health and safety issues to achieve small victories in order to build confidence in them and raise the prospect of increasing membership.

Some believe that many of the changes with regards to HRM and Social partnership has been aimed at by-passing the marginalizing union stewards, functions previously carried out by union representatives are taken over by the team leader, this can lead shop stewards feeling isolated, and therefore having reduced influence. This can all lead to unions being portrayed as an outside organisation (Fisher, Camfield & Weir, 1994). Writers have identified this kind of partnership as manipulation of the workforce by management and that workers must organise themselves independently of their employer, or call management's bluff and challenge them to demonstrate the caring and sharing valued that they profess. Trade unions can clearly spot a Trojan Horse and must maintain union presence as in the long term they will ultimately be the only real defence of workers interests (Fisher, Camfield ; Weir, 1994). Contemporary human resource management, according to Kelly, focus largely on the organisational or company needs while offering little in the way of new awareness of industrial relations and the casual

forces that guide the economy and society in general (Turner 1999). It is in Turner's review of Kelly's work that he disagrees with Kelly's opinion of social partnership.

Turner believes that Kelly views social partnership in contemptuous terms and he equates it with labour-management cooperation and implying union weakness and or the absence of conflict or Mobilization capacity. Turner goes on to make the point that it is precisely due to powerful, highly organised unions that are institutionally anchored in comprehensive collective bargaining and codetermination and conflict-tested, capable of massive Mobilization when necessary that social partnership can and does work, he cites Germany as a prominent example of this. For Turner, social partnership is a desirable way to consolidate union power for the long upswings and downswings following inevitably brief periods of broad Mobilization (Turner 1999). Other writers also believe social partnership have a more positive role to play in labour relations that Kelly states. Some aspects of the social partnership strategies offered such as the commitment to improved training, can be turned to the advantage of the workforce (Linn 1989). The Ford motor company's employee development and assistance programme" was launched with trade union support and offers financial assistance to employees for a wide range of educational and personal development courses, and education and training are key issues for any union members" (Linn 1989).

The TUC also agrees that partnership can give unions more influence over employer behaviour and workers greater control over their working environment. (Guest ; Pecci 2001)By Autumn 1999, almost 36% of <https://assignbuster.com/outline-and-assess-the-value-of-mobilization-theory/>

employees said that their pay and conditions of employment were affected by collective agreements (Hicks 2000). However, recent research would seem to back up Kelly's fears as they have highlighted that findings believe "the balance of advantage is skewed towards management and reflects generally low management trust in employee representatives" and in particular the level of direct participation in work decisions and representative participation in wider organisational policy decisions, to be 'generally low' (Guest & Pecci 2001). In many cases overall it was found, as Kelly suggests, that management gain more from social partnership agreements than employees. We now move from management strategies in the workplace to management strategies used by the state. According to the Marxist view the state was developed to represent and serve the interests of the elite ruling classes and the economically powerful capitalists.

The development of a so-called 'democratic' state, that is with votes for all citizens and free political association did not evolve until the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, and this access to and acceptance of the rights of all citizens was a direct result of much struggle and conflict that took place for representation and rights by politically and socially disadvantaged groups like the working classes. However, such struggles came at different times with varying degrees of success. In all cases the state's main objective was still to aid the rise of capitalism because it argued that this maintained peace protect property rights created employment. Protected foreign trade and often regulate money as a means of exchange as well as providing stability, law ; order (Bilton et al 1987).

Managing conflict is one of the biggest undertakings of the state. It has to ensure that the requirements of capital are addressed and, as the influence and power capital is able to apply to government, has great impact and potential. However, their demands must be balanced with the requirements and aspirations of the working classes, because to disregard or alienate it can produce a difficult or even dangerous situation for a government in terms of financial loss, social instability or uprising, a breakdown in public services, unpopularity and a loss of confidence leading to a loss of power. Miliband 1982) Ideas of 'social citizenship' emerged during the 1950s, emerged from the work of T H Marshall 1950, his theory was based on the idea that in a modern industrial democracies rights have emerged as a solution to traditional class conflicts, and that a social contract between working-class conflicts, and the capitalist state, where free-market operations are secured within certain limits, in exchange for welfare rights being guaranteed to the worker through the welfare state. Kelly points out that problems with this system can and do occur as was seen in the 1970 - 1980's, when through complex political, economic and social forces, massive changes and cut-backs took place on the expenditure and provisions of welfare services.

Kelly identifies that if the labour forces co-operation and loyalty could no longer be assured through the provision of welfare benefits, then due to workers increasingly feeling a grievance against capitalist gain, this resistance would then need to be met with domineering and repressive measures (Kelly 1998). This was indeed the case, the power of the trade unions was something Thatcher's 'New Right' government felt needed to be

curbed. Thatcher proposed no-strike agreements in essential industries and the taxation or denial of benefits of those on strike. The media at the time was also used as a state tool to translate an anti-union power mood as well as the well publicising union and worker defeats, which was a highly effective tool in demoralisation (Butler ; Kavanagh 1980). During this period there was also a major change in policing strategies and tactics. The shift from a protective style in policing to one of a reactive role.

There could be no doubt or claims of impartiality when witnessing the gross brutality that the police demonstrated against striking miners in the 1980's (Miliband 1982). Police actions became more organised and planned, such as roadblocks and arrests far away from the scenes of any disputes. These developments, together with specialised training and equipment, like riot policing and the use of mounted divisions, along with the use of force to protect strike-breakers saw the role of the army switched to the police. Miliband 1982, believes ' it is a realistic to view the police and military as a crucial component in the constraint and control of the pressure from below'.

State institutions such as the secret services, were also enlisted against the striking miners and their leaders. Evidence since recovered has shown that Arthur Scargill's phone had been tapped continually from 1970 onwards, and M15 also succeeded in planting an undercover agent ' high up' in the NUM's national office in Sheffield (Milne 1994). Employers were also given measures to challenge unions and used blacklists, containing the names of union activists in order to either avoids hiring such people in the first place or find ways of getting rid of them if already employed (Kelly 1998). Other

parts of the state made their own particular contribution to the management of worker discontent.

The court's and the judiciary, during the miner's strike enforced unusual bail conditions to prevent striking miners travelling to coalmines, other than their own. Kelly 1998) When the labour government was elected there were hopes that it might introduce changes to the law on industrial action. UK legislation is the most restrictive in Europe in this area. However, the 'Fairness at work' white paper published in May 1998, proposed only minimal changes to the law. Prime Minister, Tony Blair declared "There will be no going back.

The days of strikes without ballots, mass picketing, closed shop and secondary action are over". (Labour Research 1998)The power that the state wield in the area of labour relations is immense, but the question must be asked, 'Who wields power over the state?' Multi-national companies have the power to manipulate all areas of government. They have far more rights than ordinary citizens and have influence that can change laws in order to make bigger profits. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a Paris based group formed by 29 of the Worlds richest countries, has been negotiating the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. This will allow completely unrestricted foreign investment in the British economy (apart from Defence). There was virtually no public information on these proposals and no political debate in parliament.

This had much to do with the fact that half the World's media is already controlled by five powerful monopolies (Bruce 1998). Experts warn that over the next 10 years the balance of power will swing even more in favour of

multi-nationals, leaving Industrial Relations, and the labour force at the mercy of big business (Bruce 1998). It seems an irrefutable fact that the pressure which capital is able to exert upon the state will always be greater than those of labour. In conclusion, this essay has attempted to outline and assess the value and impact of John Kelly's 1998 Mobilization theory. The main features of a new conceptual framework based on the original work of Charles Tilly has provided a new set of hypothesis for the study of industrial relations.

At its heart is the fundamental question of how individuals are transformed into collective organisations and engage in collective action against their employers, (Kelly 1998). Kelly's answer to this question are based on social processes of industrial relations like social identities, ideologies, leadership, economic and political circumstances and opportunities. Less attention is given to Industrial structures such as collective bargaining, etc. In developing his concepts Kelly examines a wide source of materials and findings by many other experts in the field of Industrial relations. Kelly's evaluations of some of these approaches has been considered.

Mobilization theory enables us to think of the issues around collective power and action, and it is due to advances that Kelly provides understanding some concepts of its weakness can be identified. One such area is social partnership, the signifying collaborative relationship with the employer that goes beyond traditional collective bargaining over pay and conditions (Labour Research 2001). This is a hotly debated area of industrial relations with both sides proposing persuasive arguments for and against this concept. On the one hand it has been argued that social partnership, hinders <https://assignbuster.com/outline-and-assess-the-value-of-mobilization-theory/>

the recovery of union membership and is by far advantaging the employer rather than employee. Whilst others embrace the principle as a positive step towards worker empowerment, involvement and job satisfaction.

But as it makes economic sense for the balance of power to remain with the employer, workers would be sensible to remain cautious. Different parts of the state make their own particular contribution to the management of conflict. In the area of Industrial Relations, this has been experienced on a massive level especially during the last 30 years. Kelly points out how the media's well reported defeats of worker action and the withdraw of special status in common law, the average worker may show reluctance to join a trade union or indeed mobilise at all.

Kelly's Mobilization theory comes from a Marxist perspective and this in its self will lead it to be criticised by some academics who argue that employers are not simply motivated by a desire to control the workforce (Madry & Kuby 1996). Marxist Theory has been accused by some of being focused on the labour capital concept to the exclusion of almost anything else (Hyman 1987). Another factor worth consideration is made by Wilson (1987), who points out that Technological innervations may be aimed at new products and processes, rather than the labour process and this or putting pressure on suppliers to reduce their prices may be better ways of securing profit than control over labour. Marxist theory on the whole is often criticised for being too rigid in its divisions between working classes and ruling classed.

Consciousness is said to exist in a continuum rather than a simple division between socialist and bourgeois, while trade unionism is too complex to be regarded as just a manifestation of the latter. Kelly's question of how
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individuals form into a group and take action against their employers has been examined in detail in his book and his findings along with the vast amount of injustice and grievances employees suffer, in the workplace, the end of a long downswing and with new leadership oriented towards organising unions and workers would indicate that mass Mobilization may be just around the corner, and if Kelly's analysis is right.

This is the time for unions to be training and developing a core of activists who can help spark and lead collective action, that is able to reach upwards and shake the power structure.